



# ANTWERP CHARTER ON GENDER-SENSITIVE COMMUNICATION IN AND BY ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS

In recent years, significant progress has been made regarding gender equality and diversity within European academia. More universities are reflecting the composition of society. However, research shows that women's academic careers still remain characterised by strong vertical segregation.<sup>i</sup> Women hold fewer full professorships and fewer academic or organisational leadership positions than men.<sup>ii</sup> <sup>iii</sup> One important reason for this segregation is people's repeated exposure to pervasive cultural stereotypes that portray women as less competent for, and dedicated to, an academic and/or professional career.<sup>iv</sup> Such unconscious gender-based assumptions may be reflected in language (oral, written or visual) and unintentionally cause offence, giving rise to a non-supportive environment.<sup>v</sup> As a consequence, it is understood that communication in and by academic institutions plays an important role in the persistence or annihilation of such gender-based assumptions and stereotypes, constituting thresholds or advancements for women in academia.<sup>vi</sup>

This Charter therefore aims to raise the awareness of, and sensitivity to, these issues by providing suggestions for the elimination of bias from all communication, thus creating a supportive and inclusive academic institutional environment for all.



## BY SIGNING THIS CHARTER WE, AS ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS,

- Acknowledge that we share certain values and principles, such as equality, inclusion, respect for human dignity, fairness and justice for all.
- Acknowledge that academia, like all human communities, should support a diversity of talent.
- Recognise our role, amongst others, in teaching future generations and our commitment to being a role model.
- Recognise that language in the broad sense of the term - communication in all its forms - can either hinder or advance gender equality through either reproducing or counteracting existing inequalities.
- Believe that the present Charter will raise awareness of the power of language and will function as a tool to help our academic institutions advance gender equality.

## WE THEREFORE DECLARE

- In our different forms of academic institutional communication *such as, but not limited to:*
  - o *written, oral, visual, formal and informal, hierarchical and peer-to-peer;*
- Using different materials and channels of internal and external communication *such as, but not limited to:*
  - o *teaching, course material, video and audio aids, PowerPoints, meetings, e-mails, academic and student papers, e-learning platforms, smartphone apps, academic news and websites, brochures, press releases, advertising, social media, student clubs, recruitment, conference and poster announcements;*

- Towards different target groups  
*such as, but not limited to:*
  - o *professors, assistants, lecturers, speakers, workshop leaders, students, prospective students and alumni, communication and human resources staff, employees, affiliated parties and subcontractors, such as advertising and translation agencies, as well as in communication with the public at large.*

## TO COMMIT TO

- Promoting communication with respect for human dignity and social responsibility, particularly not inciting, condoning, or disregarding any form of discrimination.
- Promoting gender-sensitive communication through eliminating gender stereotypes and using multidimensional representations of women and men.
- Promoting the unbiased portrayal of women and men through a balanced presence in communication.
- Addressing in communication, based on sex-disaggregated statistics, the problem of the underrepresented sex at different academic, administrative, and technical levels, and in certain subjects, as an equality problem that deserves an adequate solution.
- Identifying and implementing actions with respect to the procedures, tools, and practices of one's own institution and national legislation to guarantee gender-sensitive communication, *by providing or striving for measures such as, but not limited to:*
  - o *general guidelines on gender-sensitive language and visual communication;*
  - o *specific guidelines on the communication of job vacancies which could also (explicitly) encourage the underrepresented sex;*
  - o *training courses in gender-sensitive communication for key actors;*
  - o *awareness-raising in gender-sensitive communication for members and employees of the academic institution;*
  - o *screening of existing communication material to improve it according to the guidelines put in place;*
  - o *a department, email address, or web service where all academic members and employees can ask for advice when in doubt concerning matters of communication, and where they can (anonymously) document incidents of gender-biased communication and/or make concrete proposals for improvements;*
  - o *a balanced communication team on the central and/or faculty boards level, so as not to miss out on talents, stances, and viewpoints;*
  - o *an implementation plan for the measures taken;*
  - o *proper monitoring and evaluation of the measures taken.*
- Publishing the present Charter, together with the measures taken by the undersigned institution, and calling upon all, including subcontractors and affiliated parties, to follow its commitments.

Date and place

Institution and stamp

---

*Catalyst. Quick Take: Women in Academia. New York: Catalyst, July 9, 2015*  
*Isabelle Vemos, "Research Management: Quotas are Questionable," Nature, no. 495, vol. 39 (March 2013).*  
*Louise Morley, "Lost Leaders: Women in the Global Academy," Presentation for the University of Sussex, Centre for Higher Education & Equity Research.*  
*iv Charles, M., & Grusky, D. B. (2004). Occupational ghettos: The worldwide segregation of women and men (Vol. 200). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.*  
*Lakoff, R. T., & Bucholtz, M. (2004). Language and woman's place: text and commentaries (Vol. 3). Oxford University Press.*  
*Wyer, M., Barbercheck, M., Cookmeyer, D., Ozturk, H., & Wayne, M. (2013). Women, science, and technology: A reader in feminist science studies. Routledge.*

